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ABSTRACT

Little evidence exists about either the short or long-term effects of coping strategies on the reduction of emotional distress or the lessening of problems. To examine the predictors and effectiveness of four marital coping efforts (negotiation, optimistic comparison, selective ignoring, and resignation), data derived from a panel study of 758 married adults interviewed in 1972 and again in 1976 were analyzed. Results showed that the level of current marital problems was strongly predictive of coping strategies: people with more problems were less likely to attempt negotiation or to make optimistic comparisons, and more likely to try selective ignoring and resignation, which increased ongoing distress and had little direct impact in either direction on later problem level. Negotiation did not reduce feelings of distress, but was associated with fewer problems later. Optimistic comparison was associated with both lower distress and fewer problems later. The strong link between problem level and choice of coping efforts suggests a worsening spiral of marital experience over time. (Author/JAC)

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Coping with Marital Problems:

Assessing Effectiveness

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Measuring Coping Effectiveness:

A Panel Analysis of Marital Problems and Coping Efforts

Abstract

Panel data from a large metropolitan population are utilized to examine the predictors and effectiveness of four marital coping efforts: negotiation, optimistic comparisons, selective ignoring, and resignation. The level of current marital problems was strongly predictive of coping strategies: people with more problems were less likely to attempt negotiation or to make optimistic comparisons, and more likely to try selective ignoring and resignation. Effectiveness was assessed net of gender, marital duration, socioeconomic status, parental experience and initial problem level. Although all four coping efforts had emerged from open-ended interviews as subjectively helpful strategies, two of the four--selective ignoring and resignation--increased ongoing distress and had little direct impact in either direction on later problem level. The yield from negotiation efforts seemed to develop slowly: while it did not reduce feelings of distress, it was associated with fewer problems at the later time point. Finally, optimistic comparisons, despite its denial-like aspects, was associated both with lower distress and with fewer later problems. The gap between perceived and observed effectiveness apparent here points to the importance of empirical assessments of coping effectiveness.

The strong link between level of problems and choice of coping efforts suggests a worsening spiral of marital experience over time: as problems mount, typical coping choices may actually exacerbate distress and increase later problems. These findings suggest the importance of identifying means to alter this spiral, as well as pointing to the many links at which it may be examined.

Measuring Coping Effectiveness:

A Panel Analysis of Marital Problems and Coping Efforts

Like stress before it, "coping" is rapidly becoming an enormously popular and increasingly ambiguous concept in a wide variety of disciplines. There are increasing efforts to describe and assess coping efforts, styles, and resources; to identify their precursors and correlates; and to recommend intervention techniques to "help people cope" with the stressors they encounter. Yet empirical knowledge, as well as conceptualization, of both coping usage and coping effectiveness lage behind popular interest.

Part of the apparent incoherence of findings in the coping literature results from the differing kinds of questions which researchers on coping have posed. Some research has focused on very broad and basic coping resources, defined as generalized attitudes and skills which are considered advantageous when dealing with all sorts of difficulty. These include attitudes about self, like self-esteem and ego strength (Worden & Sobel, 1978); attitudes about the world, including sense of coherence and perceived locus of control (Antonovsky, 1979); intellectual skills, such as analytic abilities or cognitive flexibility and complexity (Shanan et al., 1976); and interpersonal skills such as ease in interpersonal interaction, social competence, and conflict resolution skills (Linden & Feuerstein, 1981).

Without necessarily denying the advantages of such resources, other researchers have focused on more specific styles of coping, usually defined as typical or habitual preferences of ways of approaching problems. Typologies of such styles vary: Worden and Sobel (1978), for example, include suppressing negative emotional expression, blaming others versus oneself for difficulties: denying versus ruminating over troubles; and withdrawing from versus moving toward people.

Perhaps the most comprehensive categorization of styles is Haan's (1974) typology of ten processes, organized into four major functions: cognitive processing (discrimination, detachment, and means-end symbolization); focusing of attention (selective awareness); regulating affect (diversion, transformation, and restraint); and reflexive-intraceptive processing (delayed response, time reversion, and sensitivity).

Such coping style typologies, by definition, assume some cross-situational, relatively stable problem-solving tendencies in individuals. Other coping researchers, often doubting those assumptions, have focused instead on specific coping efforts--behavioral or intrapsychic actions taken in specific situations which are aimed at reducing a given problem or strain. These may include asking for help, thinking of people who are worse off, inhibiting the expression of emotion, and so forth. The typologies of specific efforts have also varied: Pearlin and Schooler (1978), for example, like Lazarus (1974), distinguish efforts aimed at altering the problem directly, altering one's way of viewing the problem, and managing the unpleasant feelings aroused by the problem.

Whether the focus is on basic coping resources, relatively general coping styles, or specific coping efforts, some claims are ordinarily made about their relative helpfulness or effectiveness in dealing with situations or events. Some use theoretical criteria to identify more or less adequate, mature or appropriate coping efforts. For example, Vaillant (1976) hierarchizes coping styles in part from theoretical concerns and in part from age trends in relative usage. Haan (1977) categorizes ego processes as adaptive or maladaptive depending on their flexibility, future-orientation, relative freedom from reality-distortion, complexity, allowance for gratifi-

cation of impulses, and expression of affect. Antonovsky (1979) also proposes criteria for evaluating the overall maturity of coping styles; he stresses flexibility, defined as creating contingent plans and tactics and being willing to consider them; farsightedness, anticipation of the long-range as well as immediate responses to actions envisaged; and rationality, seen as accuracy and objectivity of appraisal. This clearly overlaps with Haan's typology, and with Buehler and Hogan's (1980) dimensions of long-range/short-range orientations and comprehensive versus piecemeal approach to problems.

These theoretical preferences for some styles over others, however, demand greater empirical evidence of utility or effectiveness. But what criteria are appropriate to judge whether a given coping style or effort is "effective"? Should we consider reduction in the individual's subjective distress when faced with problems, as Pearlin and Schooler (1978) have done? Or should we focus on the well-being of others affected by the situation, such as spouses, co-workers, or children, as McCubbin et al. (1976) have done? Our choices may powerfully govern our declarations of effectiveness: for example, Stern and Pascale (1979) found that heart attack patients who denied the seriousness of their illness were overtly less anxious and depressed, and more likely to carry out their usual role responsibilities; but their wives were more prone to depression. Conclusions about effectiveness may also depend on the time-frame used: a response positively associated with short-term well-being (e.g., maintaining hope that one's missing in action husband will be found) may be negatively associated with well-being if it persists years afterward (Boss, 1980).

Beyond reducing the distress feeling of ourselves or involved others,

we also ordinarily entertain the hope that "coping" with a problem or difficulty may actually alleviate or remove the stressful situation. Assessing problem reduction, however, is often impossible in cross-sectional studies; efficacy in this sense may only become apparent if we have some longer-range assessment of later problem level.

Little evidence has accrued regarding either the short-term or long-range utility of coping variables, whether as judged by reductions in emotional distress or reductions in problems. Many apparent discussions of "effectiveness" have actually relied on the respondents' claims that this or that strategy or approach was helpful to them in some way (see for example, McCubbin, 1976; Berman and Turk, 1981). Such testimonials, needless to say, stand in an uncertain relationship to observed effects (Horowitz, 1978; Menaghan, 1982). Other studies (e.g., Pearlin and Schooler, 1978) have been limited to cross-sectional, simultaneous assessments of problems, coping efforts, and distress. Thus, the extent to which coping resources, styles, and efforts actually reduce problems over time demands further investigation.

As Folkman and Lazarus (1980) argue, coping choices seem more likely to be problem-specific than problem-invariant; thus, generalized coping styles may not fully capture the varying strategies people employ in dealing with specific problems. The present study, therefore, is focused on specific coping efforts in a single role area, marriage. The choice of the marital area has several advantages for exploring coping effectiveness. First, previous studies (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978) had found that role-related distress in marriage and parenting was more responsive to coping efforts than was distress in occupational and economic areas. Thus, it

seems a reasonable arena in which to examine effectiveness in problem reduction as well. Second, a variety of studies (e.g., Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, 1976) have suggested that marital problems, and the feelings of distress associated with them, are critical contributors to more pervasive feelings of depression and dissatisfaction. The identification of coping efforts which might reduce marital problems, then, has important potential for general well-being.

The present study, then, utilizes panel data from a large metropolitan population to examine the effectiveness of specific coping efforts in a single role area, marriage. The same coping efforts are assessed using two different criteria of effectiveness: the extent to which they reduce felt distress at the same time point, and the extent to which they reduce role problems over time. While limited to a single role area, this analysis offers some estimates of the varying effects which coping efforts may have in individual lives.

METHOD

Study Population

Data for the findings to be discussed here are derived from a panel study of 1106 Chicago-area adults aged 22-69, interviewed in 1972 and 1976. Samples and procedures for the larger study, focused on social stresses in everyday life, life events, and adaptation, are described in detail elsewhere (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978; Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan & Mullan, 1981). The 1972 interview includes measures of self-esteem, sense of mastery, and psychological adaptations; sources of difficulty and emotional distress associated with marital, parental, occupational, homemaking, and economic roles; reports of coping strategies used in each of these areas;

neighborhood and friendship involvements; and physical health. Identical measures of role-related difficulties and dissatisfactions, coping strategies, and overall psychological adaptation were included in the Time Two (1976) survey. In addition, the interview ascertained whether any of twenty-five possible transitions or other life events had occurred in the time between interviews. In this analysis, the study population is restricted to the 758 people married to the same partner at both time points.

Measurement of Major Variables

Problems, coping efforts, and role distress are assessed by a series of items originally developed through unstructured interviews in which respondents were asked about the problems they faced and the efforts they made to deal with them. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used to identify discrete dimensions of problems and coping efforts, to assess the extent of correlated measurement errors when identical items were asked of the same people over time, and to test the stability of factor structure over the two time points. A modified version of Joreskog and Sorbom's maximum-likelihood structural equation program (LISREL) was used to derive the factors and establish stability, and to generate Bartlett factor weights which could be used to assign factor scores.[1] Appendix A details the resulting factors, and lists the unstandardized regression weights of each item on its factors.

Coping Efforts. Four major coping factors were identified:

1) attempts at negotiation and discussion;
2) optimistic comparisons of one's situation relative to the past and relative to one's peers;

3) selective inattention to unpleasant aspects and heightened attention to positive features of the situation;

4) a conscious suppression of feeling and withdrawal from interaction.

The first of these is the only effort focused on direct modification of the problems. The second and third seem aimed at deflecting or buffering the stressful impact of problems by modifying perceptions of the problems; and the fourth is focused on managing or controlling the unpleasant feelings that may be aroused by the problem.

The latter two functions, of course, are reminiscent of Haan's (1977) attention focusing and affect regulation; and the functions also echo Folkman and Lazarus's (1980) categorizations of problem-solving behaviors, problem-solving intrapsychic action, emotion-managing behavior, and emotion-managing intrapsychic action.

Marital Problems. Three aspects of marital problems could be distinguished: a) the sense of perceived justice or equity, or the balance between what the respondent feels they give to the relationship and what they obtain; b) the emotional distance between spouses, tapping issues of the spouse's perceived love, affection, and appreciation; and c) lack of growth possibilities in the relationship, tapping the extent to which the spouse is seen as enhancing the respondent's freedom to be the kind of person they wish to be. The present analysis uses the average of these three factors to assess marital problems.[2]

Marital Distress. Ongoing distress was assessed by a series of items asking for the feelings generated by a global consideration of the marital relationship--e.g., how frustrated, unhappy, worried, bored, or tense one

felt when thinking of all the good and bad things about one's marriage.

Demographic Variables. Included were: gender, marital duration (in years), family income, occupational prestige category of the husbands (Hollinghead's categorization), and parental experience (dummy variables coding childless, children living at home less than 13, children living at home 13 or older, and children all living out of the home).[3] The inclusion of both marital duration and the categorical parental experience variable helps to capture both the possible linear and non-linear effects of time since marriage.

The variables of family income and husbands' occupational prestige (both assessed at Time One), both indirectly assess socio-economic status. Since they are strongly correlated ($r = -.51$), assessing the impact of one while statistically controlling the other may give a misleadingly low estimate of the effect of SES. In the regression equations calculated here, they are assessed as a set.

To reduce skewness in several of the variables, non-linear transformations (logarithms and exponents) were applied.[4] Table 1 displays the basic statistics and intercorrelations of the variables considered in the analysis.

Table 1 about here

It is evident that the various coping efforts are not independent of one another, nor independent of levels of problem and distress. Negotiation efforts are positively correlated with optimistic comparisons, and both are inversely correlated with extent of problems and distress. Conversely, selective ignoring and resignation are themselves positively correlated, and both are associated with greater problems and greater distress.

Coping efforts are also moderately associated with some of the demographic variables. Women are more likely to use selective ignoring than are men; those of higher socio-economic status evidence a greater usage of optimistic comparisons; those married longer show greater use of selective ignoring and resignation and lesser usage of negotiation and optimistic comparisons. These demographic variables, however, are also moderately related to the extent of marital problems and marital distress, with women, those with lower income, and those with younger children at home reporting greater problems.

The simultaneous consideration of these variables in multivariate regression equations is necessary to disentangle the independent effects of these variables.

The Analytic Model

As other researchers (e.g., Ekehammar, 1974; Hill, 1949) have argued, it is reasonable to expect the final outcomes of coping processes to be influenced both by the characteristics of the situation to which people are responding and by the actual coping efforts they make. Conceptualizing the relationship between role problems, role distress, and coping raises several knotty issues. At any given point in time, problems, distress, and coping variables are all correlated. Does the association of negotiation and optimistic comparisons with less distress, for example, suggest that they reduce distress or suggest that people with fewer problems are more apt to sit down and talk things out, and more able to view their marriage in positive terms? In short, net of their association with fewer marital problems, do such coping efforts really reduce distress? If we control for level of problems, however, we are ignoring the possibility that fewer

problems at any point in time may reflect the effectiveness of past coping in reducing problems. If we insist that coping be assessed net of such impact, we run the risk of underestimating its effectiveness.

In this analysis, current coping is considered to be a response to current strain. The impact of coping in reducing strain, on the other hand, is assumed to take some time to occur. Thus, the impact of strain on coping, and of coping on stress, is immediate, while the impact of coping on strain is assumed to be lagged.

Figure 1 depicts the basic model underlying this analysis. Within any time point, the situational context (one's gender, social class, family income, marital duration and parental responsibilities) influences one's marital strains (path a); and the level of strain, as well as the situational context, influences one's choice of coping efforts (paths b, c). Such coping efforts reduce felt distress at the time (path e). The extent of reduction may be conditioned by the situational context and the level of strains; and these may also have direct effects (paths d, f).

Figure 1 about here

Across time, coping is expected to reduce later strain (path g), even when prior strain, prior distress and prior situational characteristics are controlled (paths h, i, j). In turn, later marital problems may themselves shape differing coping strategies at later time points; and these altered strategies may influence later distress; but exploring such changes in coping over time, and such consequent changes in distress, are not tasks of the present analysis.

FINDINGS

The analytic model views ongoing role problems as influencing coping efforts; coping efforts, in turn, may alter later role problems as well as reduce current distress. To explore this model, multiple regression equations were calculated for each of the dependent variables: initial role problems (Table 2), initial coping efforts (Table 3), initial distress (Table 4) and subsequent role problems (Table 5).

Each table displays the unstandardized coefficients, standardized beta coefficients, and the squared semi-partial correlation coefficient (sr^2), which represents the proportion of variance explained by each variable or variable set, net of that explained by all other variables in the equation at the same time.

Table 2 about here

Initial Role Problems. As Table 2 shows, the situational context variables explain only five percent of the variance in initial problem level, indicating that many other factors outside this model are shaping the level of marital difficulty at any given point in time. Net of the other variables, initial role problems were higher for women and for those married longer. They also varied with parental experience, being highest for those with younger (12 and under) children living at home, and lowest for parents whose children had all left home. Socio-economic status, as indicated by the variable set income and social class, was not significantly related to initial problem level.

Table 3 about here

Marital Coping Efforts. Table 3 displays the regression of all four coping efforts on the situational context variables and initial problem level.

Two equations are shown for each coping effort: first before controlling for initial problem level, and second with initial problem level controlled.

For all four coping variables, the level of current marital problems was strongly predictive: married people with relatively few problems were more apt to see their marriage optimistically, more apt to negotiate problems, less prone to selectively ignore their discontents, and less likely to seek some resigned accommodation to their problems.

With level of problems held constant, the contextual variables had some direct effects: women were more apt to use negotiation, those with higher incomes made more optimistic comparisons, and women did more selective ignoring. The situational variables explain from one to five percent of variance, net of problem level; some of their impact on coping efforts seems to operate indirectly through their association with level of problems.

Reducing Felt Distress. Table 4 shows a series of regression equations detailing the linkage between coping efforts and felt distress. Column 1 shows the impact of the four coping variables, accounting for 21 percent of the variance, before problems or situations are controlled. All four coping efforts significantly influenced role distress net of one another, with negotiation and optimistic comparisons reducing it but selective ignoring and resignation exacerbating distress. As column 2 of Table 4 shows, these associations are not entirely accounted for by their association with marital strain: when this is statistically held constant, all of the coping efforts but negotiation continue to exert an impact. Together, role problems and coping efforts explain about 31 percent of the variance in marital distress. For any level of problems, it appears, attempting to cope by resignation and selective ignoring, and viewing one's

situation relatively pessimistically, is associated with heightened feelings of distress.

Table 4 about here

The final column of Table 4 includes the situational variables. Net of coping and problems, they have little direct impact on distress; and they increase explained variance by about two percent. Thus, the impact of the contextual variables seems limited to their indirect impact through level of problems and choice of coping efforts.

Table 5 about here

Reducing Later Role Problems. While such coping strategies may reduce one's distress, this does not necessarily mean that they are helpful in altering the problems themselves. The panel data helps to answer this question.

Table 5 displays the relevant regression equations. The four columns show the effects of sequentially adding distress, coping efforts, problem level, and the contextual variables to the equation. With Time One distress held constant, both negotiation and optimistic comparison significantly reduce later role problems. In contrast, neither selective ignoring nor resignation directly influence the level of later problems. They do, of course, nevertheless have an important indirect effect through their negative impact on marital distress; as Table 5 shows, heightened initial distress is strongly related to greater Time Two problems.

With initial level of problems also held constant (column 3, Table 5), tbe magnitudes of the other coefficients are reduced, but the overall findings are unaltered. The situational variables, while not powerfully increasing explained variance, suggest that for any given level of initial strain, stress,

and coping, women and those married a shorter time have more marital problems. Neither socio-economic status nor parental experience has any direct impact on later strain.

Thus, the analyses suggest that selective ignoring and resignation play a direct role in exacerbating ongoing distress but have only an indirect impact on long term problem levels. Negotiation shows the opposite pattern, insignificant in influencing ongoing distress but important in eventually reducing problems. Only optimistic comparisons is significant both in reducing felt distress and reducing later problems.

Interactive Models. The equations shown so far reflect a straightforward linear additive model: the impact of each variable is assumed to be constant over all levels of all other variables. Several other possibilities, however, are plausible. Given the association of different levels of problems with different coping choices, for example, it is possible that some coping strategies are accurately judged by the respondents to have greater or lesser payoff in situations of higher conflict. In other words, the effectiveness of the various coping strategies, in reducing either ongoing distress or later strain, may vary with the level of initial problems. For example, La Rocco, House and French (1980) have recently argued that social support variables may have their strongest impact on people under the most stressful situations, and have relatively little effect for people with few problems. If this is also true for coping efforts, the linear additive model will underestimate their effect for some and over-estimate it for others.

A second interactive possibility is a non-uniform impact of coping strategies for people in different situational contexts. Do the coping

variables have equal impact, for example, for men and for women, for those recently married as for those married a long time, for the working as for the middle class, for those who have young children in their households as for those who do not?

To assess these possibilities, a series of regression equations were calculated which included in their final step one of the multiplicative terms representing such interactions.[5] There was no evidence that the impact of the coping variables varied at different levels of strain, whether in affecting ongoing distress or in reducing later problems. There was also no evidence that the impacts of coping strategies were different for those with varying marital durations, for those with differing parental responsibilities, or for men and women. Three interactive effects were significant: both negotiation and optimistic comparisons were more potent in reducing later problems for those from higher occupational prestige categories; and the positive impact of negotiation in reducing later problems was also stronger for those with higher initial distress. While statistically significant, the effects were fairly minor, increasing explained variance by less than two percent.

DISCUSSION

Although all four marital coping efforts had emerged from open-ended interviews as subjectively helpful strategies, two of the four--selective ignoring and resignation--increased ongoing distress and had little direct impact in either direction on later problem level. The yield from negotiation effort seemed to develop slowly: while it did not reduce feelings of distress, it was associated with fewer problems at a later timepoint. Finally, optimistic comparisons, despite its denial-like aspects, was associated both with lower distress and fewer later problems.

The findings point up how one's conclusions about effectiveness may depend on how one measures it. For example, if only reduction in feelings of distress had been considered, one might conclude that negotiation made very little difference, and miss its positive role in reducing later problems. Considering both ongoing distress and later problem levels also permits a greater understanding of the direct and indirect impact of coping efforts. Attempting to manage unpleasant feelings by resignationa and withdrawal, we learn, actually increases distress; and it is through this impact on distress that they are associated with grater problems at later time points, rather than having a direct impact. Optimistic comparison emerges as the only strategy with direct effects on both distress and later problems. Unlike negotiation, this is a strategy that need not involve cooperation from one's partner. While it is more common for those with fewer problems, it is effective at all problem levels. It is possible that such rosy appraisals, by reducing feelings of threat and discouragement, dampening impulses toward termination, and generating positive expectations, tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies by leading to altered behavior on the part of the appraiser. More generally, how such interpretive efforts may feed back on behavior in relationships is a key question for future study.

Two other findings are also intriguing. The two strategies effective in reducing later problems--negotiation and optimistic comparisons--proved less effective for those from lower occupational prestige categories and lower family incomes. This finding suggests that to some extent marital problems may reflect, or be exacerbated by, the durable economic pressures of lower class life; and amelioration of such pressures may be necessary before individual efforts at resolution of marital problems can yield much change.

A second unexpected finding was the association of shorter marital duration with fewer initial problems (table 2), but with greater deterioration over time (Table 5). This greater increase in marital problems is net of parental experience, social class variables, gender, initial levels of problem and distress, and initial coping efforts. Thus, although more recently married respondents began with fewer problems, greater use of negotiation and optimistic comparisons, and lesser use of selective ignoring, their Time Two problem levels are worse than this advantageous profile would suggest. It is impossible here to separate membership in particular marriage cohorts from variations in marital duration; but this finding suggests that the earlier years of marriage pose greater possibilities for negative changes than do the later years.

At least in the marital role area, none of the three types of coping efforts discussed by Lazarus and by Pearlin--direct action, perceptual or interpretive strategies, and feeling management--are consistently effective by both of the criteria used here. In part, of course, this may be due to the specific content of each type included here. Certainly, other forms of action and other forms of feeling management may yield different conclusions. The impact of the one type for which there was more than one strategy--interpretive--varied with the specific strategy used, with selective inattention ineffective or actually counterproductive but optimistic comparison effective by both criteria. It will be important to widen the net of possible coping strategies within each type before firm conclusions about effectiveness can be reached.

In marriage in particular, but for other role problems as well, future studies could also profitably focus on the perceived problems, distress

feelings, and coping efforts of both partners--the effectiveness of one's efforts may in part depend on how well thay mesh with the efforts and perceptions of one's spouse.

It is also important to extend the present analysis to other role areas. Valuable in themselves, such studies would also help us to discover whether the effectiveness of specific strategies depends on the role area under consideration. For example, analses of parents' concerns about their adolescent and young adult children (Menaghan, 1978), which used parents' subjective report of problem relief as the outcome variable, and parents' seeking of advice and assistance from others as the coping effort, found that getting "a new way to look at things" (an interpretive strategy), even without any direct action to reduce problems, was associated with a sense of relief. Parallel analyses, however, suggested that such interpretive aid was of little value for occupational and economic problems; and Pearlin and Schooler (1978) found that occupational and economic problems were more resistant to coping efforts of all sorts. Similarly, parallel studies of selective inattention as a response to parenting problems, occupational problems, and economic problems might confirm its apparent inefficacy, or lead us to specify role areas for which this is a quite useful strategy.

Finally, the strong link between level of problems and choice of coping efforts apparent in this analysis suggests a worsening spiral of marital role problems over time: as problems mount, typical coping choices may actually exacerbate distress. And higher distress takes its own toll; over time, initially higher problems, less effective coping strategies, and higher distress all in turn increase later levels of marital problems. These findings suggest the importance of identifying means to alter this spiral, as well as pointing to the many links at which it may be examined.

Figure 1. Marital Coping Usage and Effectiveness: Analytic Model

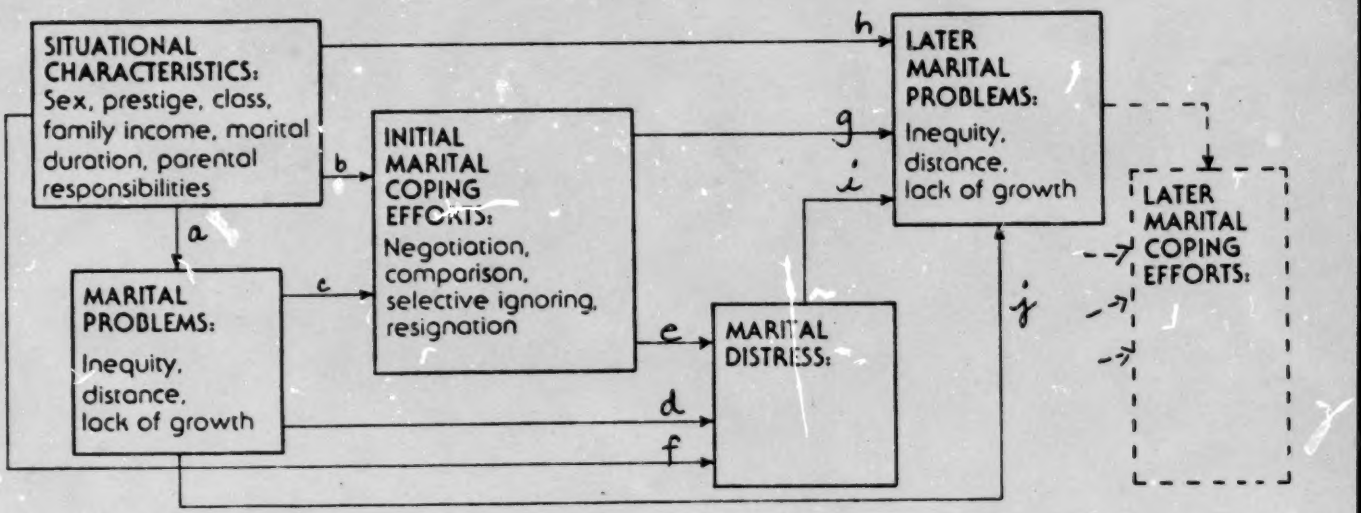

Table 1. Basic Statistics and Correlations

									Initial Marital Coping					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
1	100[a]													
2	01	100												
3	03	-51	100											
4	01	09	-05	100										
5	-08	07	08	28	100									
6	-06	01	06	-44	40	100								
7	-02	04	15	32	31	01	100							
8	-13	-00	01	-00	03	11	07	100						
9	-06	-04	02	-08	-07	-05	-09	-26	100					
10	06	-10	12	-08	-04	-03	-06	-30	29	100				
11	-18	03	-07	15	03	-06	02	27	-13	-06	100			
12	-04	04	-04	09	07	-02	04	35	-20	-21	44	100		
13	-13	10	-10	05	04	10	02	52	-43	-45	27	39	100	
14	-13	00	-10	-07	05	09	-00	39	-28	-30	13	21	45	100
Means	0.45	3.84	-.72	17.06	.10	.59	.46	7.34	20.67	33.06	9.66	9.70	24.74	25.43
S.D.	.50	1.69	.39	10.82	.31	.49	.50	1.22	4.98	7.45	.25	.23	2.03	1.57
N	758	734	751	758	758	758	758	758	754	750	750	753	753	737

Key to Variable Measurement:

1 Sex (1=male/0=female
2 Class (1=prof-adm/7=unskilled worker)
3 Income (log of family income)
4 Marital Duration (years married range from 1 to 47)
5 Parental Status (1=childless/0=parent)
6 Children Home LE 13 (1=yes/0=no)
7 Children Home GE 13 (1=yes/0=no)
8 **Initial Marital Distress**
9 Initial Negotiation
10 Initial Optimistic Comparisons
11 Initial Selective Ignoring
12 Initial Resignation
13 Initial Marital Problems
14 Later Marital Problems

[a]Leading decimals are omitted from correlations. For sample size of 758 correlations of .08 or larger are statistically significant at the .05 level.

Table 2. The Impact of Situational Context on Initial Marital Problems: Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	B	Beta	Sr^2
Sex	-.507	-.124*	.015*
Class	.064	.053	.011
Income	-.360	-.068	
Marital Duration	.029*	.155*	.013*
Parental Experience			.022*
Childless	.630	.095	
Children LE 12	.846*	.206*	
Children GE 13	.018	.004	
Empty Nest[a]	--	--	
Intercept	24.024		
R^2 =			.050

[a]Used as reference category

*P < .05

TABLE 3. THE IMPACT OF SITUATIONAL CONTEXT AND INITIAL MARITAL PROBLEMS ON SPECIFIC MARITAL COPING EFFORTS: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Variables	(1) B	(1) Beta	(1) sr^2	(2) B	(2) Beta	(2) sr^2	(1) B	(1) Beta	(1) sr^2	(2) B	(2) Beta	(2) sr^2
	Negotiation						Comparisons					
Situational Context			.024			.023			.033			.011
Sex	-.631	-.063	.004	-1.174*	-.117*	.013	.745	.050	.002	-.076	-.005	.000
Class	-.051	-.017	}	.017	.006	}	-.142	-.032	}	-.038	-.009	}
Income	.313	.024	.001	-.072	-.006	.000	2.096*	.109*	.015	1.513*	.078*	.007
Marital Duration	-.053*	-.115*	.007	-.022	-.047	.001	-.78*	-.114*	.007	-.031	-.045	.001
Parental Experience	*		.012			.005			.009			.002
Childless	.289	-.018		.389	.024		-1.28	-.052		-.255	-.010	
Children less than 13	-1.105*	-.109*		-.199	-.020		-1.59	-.105		-.220	-.015	
Children greater than 12	-.591	-.059		-.572	-.057		-.84	-.056		-.813	-.054	
Empty Nest[a]	--	--		--	--		--	--		--	--	
Initial Problems				-1.070*	-.436*	.180				-1.62*	-.441*	.184
Intercept	22.936			48.647			36.292			75.215		
R^2 =			.024			.204			.033			.217

[a]Used as reference category
*p .05

Variables	(1) B	(1) Beta	(1) sr^2	(2) B	(2) Beta	(2) sr^2	(1) B	(1) Beta	(1) sr^2	(2) B	(2) Beta	(2) sr^2
	Ignoring						Resignation					
Situational Context			.060			.045			.014			.010
Sex	-.088*	-.177*	.031	-.073*	-.146*	.021	-.019	-.041	.002	.004	.008	.000
Class	-.002	-.017	}	-.004	-.030	}	.002	.018	}	-.000	-.003	}
Income	-.041	-.065	.003	-.031	-.048	.002	-.017	-.028	.002	-.001	-.001	.000
Marital Duration	.004*	.177*	.017	.003*	.139*	.010	.002	.076	.003	.000	.015	.000
Parental Experience			.001			.002			.002			005
Childless	.027	.033		.008	.009		-.032	-.043		-.061	-.081	
Children less than 13	.010	.021		-.015	-.029		-.001	-.001		-.039	-.083	
Children greater than 12	-.011	-.023		-.012	-.024		.004	.008		.003	.007	
Empty Nest	--			--			--			--		
Initial Problems				.030*	.244*	.057				.045*	.398*	.150
Intercept	9.63			8.918			9.633			8.552		
R^2			.060			.117			.014			.164

[a]Used as reference category

Table 4. The Impact of Situational Context, Initial Problems, and Coping Efforts on Marital Distress: Regression Analysis

Variables	(1) B	(1) Beta	(1) Sr^2	(2) B	(2) Beta	(2) Sr^2	(3) B	(3) Beta	(3) Sr^2
Coping			.213			.037			.040
Negotiation	-.03*	-.122		-.007	-027		-.007	-.030	
Comparison	-.03*	-.183		-.013*	-081		-.014*	-.088	
Ignoring	.69*	.141		.453*	.092		.478*	+.097	
Resignation	1.17*	.221		.710*	.134		.742*	.140	
Initial Problems				.238*	398	.098	.231*	.385	.089
Situation									.017
Sex							-.116	-.047	.002
Class							-.019	-.026	.005
Income							.170	.054	.005
Marital Duration							-.003	-.026	.000
Parental Experience									.006
Childless							.20	-051	
Children Less than 13							.18	-074	
Children Greater than 12							.14	-059	
Empty Nest[a]							---	---	
Intercept				-9.259			-9.470		
R^2 =			.213			.311			.328

*p < .05

a Used as a reference category

TABLE 5. THE IMPACT OF SITUATIONAL CONTEXT, INITIAL PROBLEMS, COPING EFFORTS, AND DISTRESS ON LATER MARITAL PROBLEMS: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

	(1)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
Variables	B	Beta	sr^2	b	Beta	sr^2	B	Beta	sr^2	B	Beta	sr^2
Initial Distress	.498*	.385	.148	.363*	.280	.060	.249*	.193	.026	.235*	.182	.022
Initial Coping:						.056			.024			.018
Negotiation				-.047*	-.147		-.026*	-.083		-.031*	-.098	
Comparisons				-.035*	-.163		-.019*	-.091		-.022*	-.102	
Ignoring				.018	.003		-.117	-.018		-.089	-.014	
Resignation				.319	.047		.034	.005		.052	.008	
Initial Problems							.217*	.279	.043	.215*	.277	.040
Situation:												.019
Sex										-.216*	-.068 *	.004*
Class										-.019	-.020	.001
Income										.078	.019	
Marital Duration										-.020*	-.138 *	.010*
Parental Experience												.005
Childless										-.454	-.088	
Children less than 13										-.223	-.070	
Children Greater than 12										-.075	-.024	
Empty Nest[a]										--		
Intercept	21.777			21.601			20.222			20.868		
R^2 =			.148			.208			.250			.269

*p < .05

[a]Used as reference category

FOOTNOTES

[1]In longitudinal studies, asking identical questions of the same respondents at two or more time points increases the likelihood of correlated errors. Statistical procedures in the maximum likelihood confirmatory factor analysis programs developed by Joreskog (Joreskog, 1969; Joreskog and Van Thillo, 1972) permit estimation of the extent of such correlated errors. They also permit researchers to test explicitly the invariance of factor structures at multiple time points. In no case was there a significant improvement in fit when models that permitted factor loadings to vary over time were compared with models that constrained the factor loadings to be equal; this increases confidence that the relationship between our constructs and indicators has remained stable over time.

Appendix A shows the exact wording of items used, and the unstandardized regression weights of each item on its factors (indicating the extent to which item variance can be attributed to the factor rather than to error). The program also generates Bartlett factor weights (Lawley & Maxwell, 1971), which can be used to construct factor scores. As Appendix A shows, the correlations between the factor scores and the concepts are fairly strong (average concept-factor correlation for the set of variables is .86), indicating adequate reliability of the factor scores. The regression analyses reported here used ordinary least squares regression with the constructed factor scores.

[2]The three factors are all moderately and positively intercorrelated; they were combined into a single score to obtain more stable results. Preliminary analyses using the three separate subscales were generally consistent with the overall measure reported here.

[3]The choice of dummy variables to represent variations in parental experience was guided by preliminary analyses suggesting that these adequately captured essential variations in parental experience. In particular, there was no explanatory advantage gained by distinguishing children less than 6 from children 6 to 12.

[4]Specifically, both negotiation and optimistic comparisons were skewed left, and marital problems, marital distress, selective ignoring, resignation, and family income were skewed right. These variables were first linearly recoded so that their values ranged between 0 and 1, and then exponents of the left-skewed variables and natural logarithms of the right-skewed variables were taken. This procedure follows Hartwig and Dearing, 1979.

[5]Interaction effects were carried by multiplicative terms. In the case of two continuous variables, such terms leave both high-low combinations of variables at an intermediate point and contrast at their extremes respondents high on both variables and low on each. By reversing the scoring of one variable, the interaction term can contrast those high on A-low on B with those low on A-high on B, leaving both high-high and low-low combinations at intermediate points. By computing both sorts of interaction terms, we increase the form of interactions that can be uncovered.

Because such interaction terms are correlated with one another, each term was added separately as a final step to the linear additive model, and the increment in explained variance was evaluated by a hierarchical F-test.

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APPENDIX A

Measures of Marital Coping Efforts, Marital Problems, and Marital Stress

	Lambda Values
1. *Negotiation:*	
a) How often do you sit down and talk things out?	1.00
b) How often do you try to find a fair compromise?	.42
Average concept/factor correlation = .91 χ^2/d.f. = 0.32	
2. *Optimistic Comparisons:*	
a) How often do you appreciate your own marriage more after seeing what other marriages are like?	1.00
b) Judging from your personal experiences, would you say that your marriage gets better with time, that it stays about the same, or that it gets less good with time?	.36
c) All things considered, how would you compare your marriage to that of most other people like yourself? Would you say that your marriage is: much better than most, somewhat better, about the same, not quite as good as most, much worse than most?	.44
Average concept/factor correlation = .82 χ^2/d.f. = 1.1	
3. *Selective Ignoring:*	
a) How often do you try to ignore difficulties by looking only at the good things?	.90
b) How often do you tell yourself the difficulties are not important?	.85
c) How often do you try to overlook your husband/wife's faults and pay attention only to good points?	1.00
d) How often do you wait for time to remedy the difficulty?	.94
e) How often do you keep so busy you don't have time to think?	.61
Average concept/factor correlation = .85 χ^2/d.f. = 1.56	
4. *Helpless Resignation:*	
a) How often do you just keep hurt feelings to yourself?	.80
b) How often do you keep out of your husband/wife's way for a while?	1.00
c) How often do you give in more than halfway?	.16
Average concept/factor correlation = .71 χ^2/d.f. = .72	
5. *Marital Problems:* (4-point scale indicating agreement/disagreement)	
a) Inequity	
1. My husband/wife insists on having his/her own way.	1.00
2. My husband/wife usually expects more from me than he/she is willing to give	.98
3. My husband/wife usually acts as if he/she were the only important person in the family.	.74
4. Generally, I give in more to my husband/wife's wishes than he/she gives in to mine.	.93
Average concept/factor correlation = .90 χ^2/d.f. = 4.2	
b) Distance	
My husband/wife is someone who . . .	
1. I can really talk with about things that are important to me.	1.00
2. is a good sexual partner	.71
3. is affectionate toward me.	.87
4. appreciates the job I do as a wage-earner/housekeeper.	.56
5. seems to bring out the best in me.	.51
6. appreciates me just as I am.	.50
Average concept/factor correlation = .88 χ^2/d.f. = 2.45	
c) Lack of Growth	
1. My marriage doesn't give me enough opportunity to become the sort of person I'd like to be.	1.00
2. I cannot completely by myself around my husband/wife.	.90
3. My husband/wife seems to bring out the best in me.	.43
4. My husband/wife appreciates me just as I am.	.42
5. My husband/wife is someone who appreciates the job I do as a wage earner/housekeeper.	.19
Average concept/factor correlation = .86 χ^2/d.f. = 2.45	
6. *Marital Distress:*	
Think now of all the pleasures and problems that go into daily life with your husband/wife. When you think of these things, . . .	
a) how bothered or upset do you feel?	.92
b) how contented do you feel?*	.65
c) how tense do you feel?	1.00
d) how bored do you feel?	.69
e) how frustrated do you feel?	.98
f) how relaxed do you feel?*	.77
g) how unhappy do you feel?	.81
h) how worried do you feel?	.89
i) how neglected to you feel?	.73
Average concept/factor correlation = .95 χ^2/d.f. = 3.3	

* Items b and f errors correlated within time.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE